

A NEW RECREATION PATH

Rail History

In the mid-1800's, the now unused rail line between the Needham Junction commuter rail station and Medfield was part of track system that extended between Boston and Woonsocket, Rhode Island for passenger and freight trains. Eventually, the use of the tracks for passenger transportation was eliminated and the use converted to the movement of freight.

The MBTA became owner of the line in the early 1970's and eventually leased the portion from Medfield to Newton to the Bay Colony Railroad as a freight line.



With the decline of rail dependent industries in the industrial areas of Needham and Newton Upper Falls, the need for the freight lines decreased. By 2008, Bay Colony had ceased operations.

The MBTA retains ownership of the lines, and based on a 2008 transportation study have determined that the abandoned rail will not be used for commuter rail purposes.

We are excited to talk about the next "life" of this route in Needham!

STUDY OF A NEW PATH IN NEEDHAM

For decades, informal conversations have been held with residents, the Park and Recreation Commission and the department's staff...wouldn't it be great to convert the rails that had been used for freight purposes into a trail. The major obstacle over the years was the continued use of the line by the Bay Colony Rail. By 2008, it was clear that Bay Colony would no longer be using the line. Needham resident Tad Staley approached Park and Recreation Director Patty Carey and said "What if...?" and that was the start of a relationship between the Board of Selectmen/Park and Recreation Commission and what was to become the non-profit Bay Colony Rail Trail Association (BCRTA).

The Board of Selectmen will make the final decision on whether to recommend entering a lease with the MBTA and ask for approval at Town Meeting.

The Bay Colony Rail Trail Association has membership from Needham, Dover and Medfield, and volunteers from each of the communities has provided invaluable research for the three communities. Though studying the project together, each town would



Looking towards the Charles River Peninsula

The Park and Recreation Commission is the public board guiding the review of the possible creation of the pedestrian path. Currently, all meeting agendas include an update on the study of the possible path. The Director of Park and Recreation serves as the lead staff person working with BCRTA and adjacent

communities, and the Assistant Director of Park and Recreation is providing support to the volunteer efforts.

Meetings are held with Town officials from Needham, Dover, Medfield, and Newton, as well as with Representative Denise Garlick.

WORKING WITH NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES

make individual decisions, enter into their own leases with the MBTA and manage and maintain its own sections. Dover and Medfield have created their own fundraising groups.

Regular conversations are

held with the City of Newton and its volunteer organization. It is also important to learn from communities who have already created paths on abandoned rails, so we talk to them their successes—and how to avoid their mistakes!

Trails in Needham

- Trails Master Plan completed in 2008, providing information on current trails and envisioning new trails and connections;
- Results from National Citizens' Surveys in 2008, 2010, and 2012 have highlighted high level of interest in trails in Needham community;
- Trail Steward program established. Stewards regularly walk assigned trail, do light maintenance and report major maintenance needs. DPW Parks and Forestry assists with some maintenance projects and volunteers assist with others;
- Community Preservation Fund proposals are currently under review to create an ADA accessible trail around the Reservoir, connect a loop at the end of the Esker Trail at Ridge Hill, and rebuild the trail system at Newman's Eastman Conservation Area and connect to a new trail and educational site at the Carol/Brewster properties and Anna Volante property;
- Working with the state to create an ADA accessible path between Highland Avenue and 4th Avenue, as well as establishing a new trail along the Sudbury Aqueduct.

THE MBTA

During the Summer of 2012, officials in Needham, Dover, Medfield and Newton requested that the MBTA consider leasing the abandoned rail lines in those communities to each of them. Town

Manager Kate Fitzpatrick spoke on behalf of the request at an MBTA Board of Director's meeting, and in July, the Board voted to authorize 99 year leases with each of the communities. In

the past, the MBTA has signed leases with 30 other municipalities for the creation of new trails and recreation paths.

The Needham Board of Selectmen must now decide whether to recommend the lease to Town Meeting, which could come as early as May 2013.

Needham resident Kathleen Phelps, a member of the BCRTA, is providing pro-bono legal assistance in the discussions with the MBTA.

There are still many questions to pose to the MBTA regarding the lease, including but not limited to:

- Where would the MBTA retain ownership for the commuter rail line, and provide a starting point for recreational use?
- What are the options for shared mass transportation and pedestrian route in the northern section?



Bridge to Dover over the Charles River

OTHER STATE ORGANIZATIONS

The Boston Region of the Metropolitan Planning Organization was asked by town officials in Needham, Dover and Medfield to provide a feasibility study on the possibility of a rail trail from Needham Junction through Medfield. A draft report is under review. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council is

studying the possibility of mass transit on the section that connects with Newton. MassDOT is in the design phase for Route 128 Add-A-Lane, and that project will remove the bridge crossing over Route 128. According to Project Manager Lawrence Cash, "The work to create a rail trail on this RR line sim-

ply cannot be included in the Route 128 Add-A-Lane project. This will clearly need to be handled as a separate project, with separate funds, and separate permitting. I am sure that MassDOT will need to be involved some way or another in the future given the bridge work that is required."

PHOTOS

Between Route 128 and Charles River



Bridge over river to Newton



Bridges over Chestnut Street

High Rock Street area



“SOUTHERN” SECTION

The current focus of this project is on the “southern” portion of the trail. There is a 2 mile stretch between Needham Junction and the Charles River. If a connection can be maintained across the Charles River, the trail would continue another 5 miles through Dover and into Medfield, ending on Icehouse Road.

Some of the major issues to be resolved are noted on the map below:

A - The Junction

Where will the actual lease begin? How can a connection

be created near Chestnut Street, so that the businesses and commuter rail are linked to the trail? How will the live commuter rail be disconnected from the pathway?

B - Charles River Street

How will pedestrians be able to safely cross over Charles River Street? The sight lines are not optimal, and traffic volume increases during commuter hours.

C - Fisher Street

How will pedestrians cross over safely?

D - the Charles River

Can a bridge be retained to continue along the trail to Dover? How will Dover assist with funding repairs/replacement? If bridge is not repaired, how is access blocked?

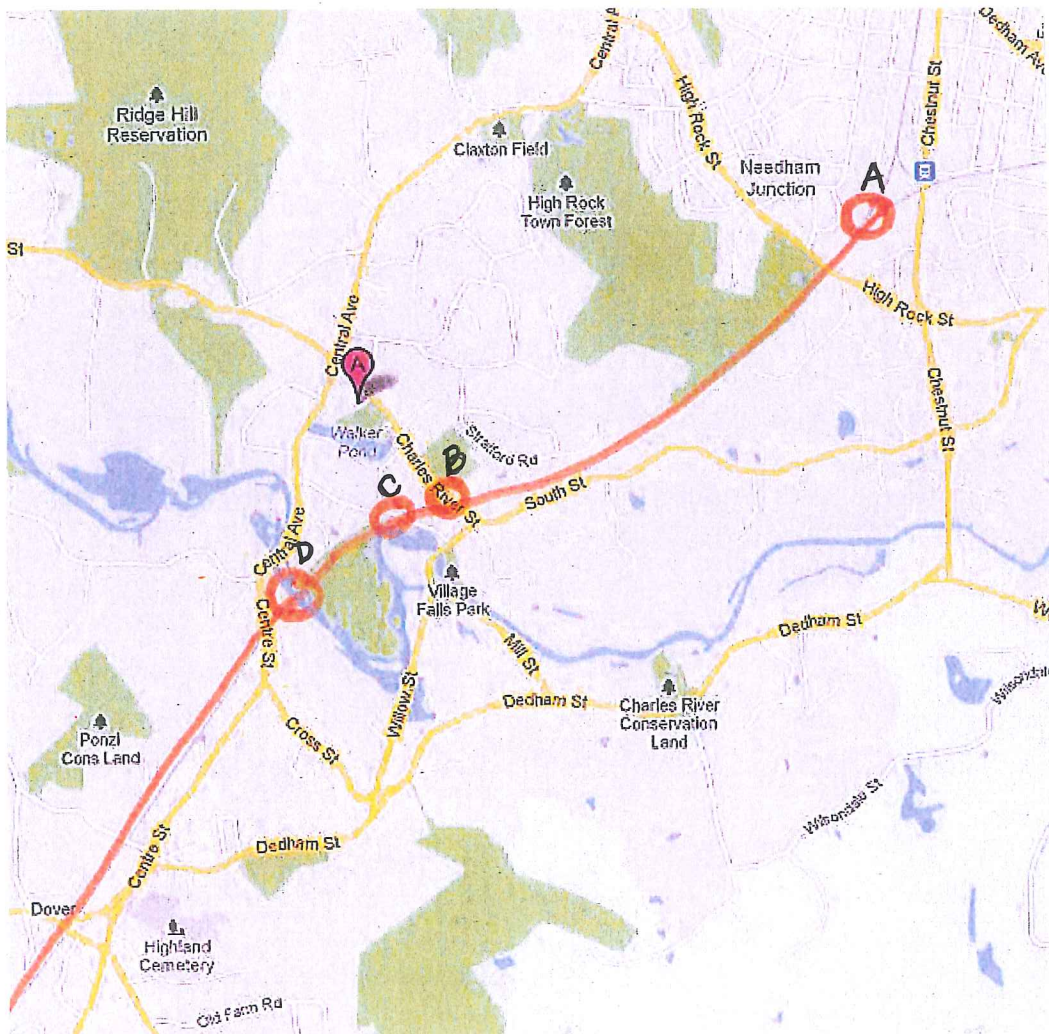
Features along route:

- Access to large trail system in Town Forest
- Access for residents in Linden Street area and from Walker School
- Access to DCR's Red Wing Bay, and Trustees of Reservation's Charles River Peninsula

The Study

At the November 2012 Special Town Meeting, the Bay Colony Rail Trail Association was appropriated \$35,000 from Community Preservation Funds to work with the Town to answer some questions about this section of rail. This information will assist the Board of Selectmen with their determination on whether to pursue the lease with the MBTA. Some of the questions to be answered:

- How can access be created to the area off Chestnut Street, and be safely disconnected from the active commuter rail?
- Where can people park to access the trail?
- What are the wetland and stormwater issues that will need to be resolved?
- What is the condition of the wooden bridge that crosses the Charles River, and can it be restored, or will it need to be replaced?
- What options are available for safe crossings at Charles River Street and Fisher Street?
- What options are there for surfaces and what is the cost differential?
- How can the path become an asset to abutters and not a concern?



“NORTHERN” SECTION

This section has more issues to resolve than the southern section, so is for a later phase of work, while efforts continue on resolutions.

The Heights

Where will the actual lease begin? How will the live commuter rail be disconnected from the pathway? What are +/- impacts on densely populated neighborhoods and heavily traveled roads?

A - Webster Street

How will pedestrians be able to safely cross over Webster Street? The sight lines are

not optimal, and traffic volume increases during commuter hours and is steady throughout the day.

B - Gould Street

How will pedestrians cross over safely? Gould Street is the most challenging road crossing.

C - Route 128

Will mass transit share a new bridge with pedestrians over the highway? How will new bridge be funded? Will timing of Add-A-Lane project impact timing of bridge replacement?

D - the Charles River

Can a bridge be retained to continue along the trail to Newton? How will Newton assist with funding repairs/replacement? If bridge is not repaired, how is access blocked?

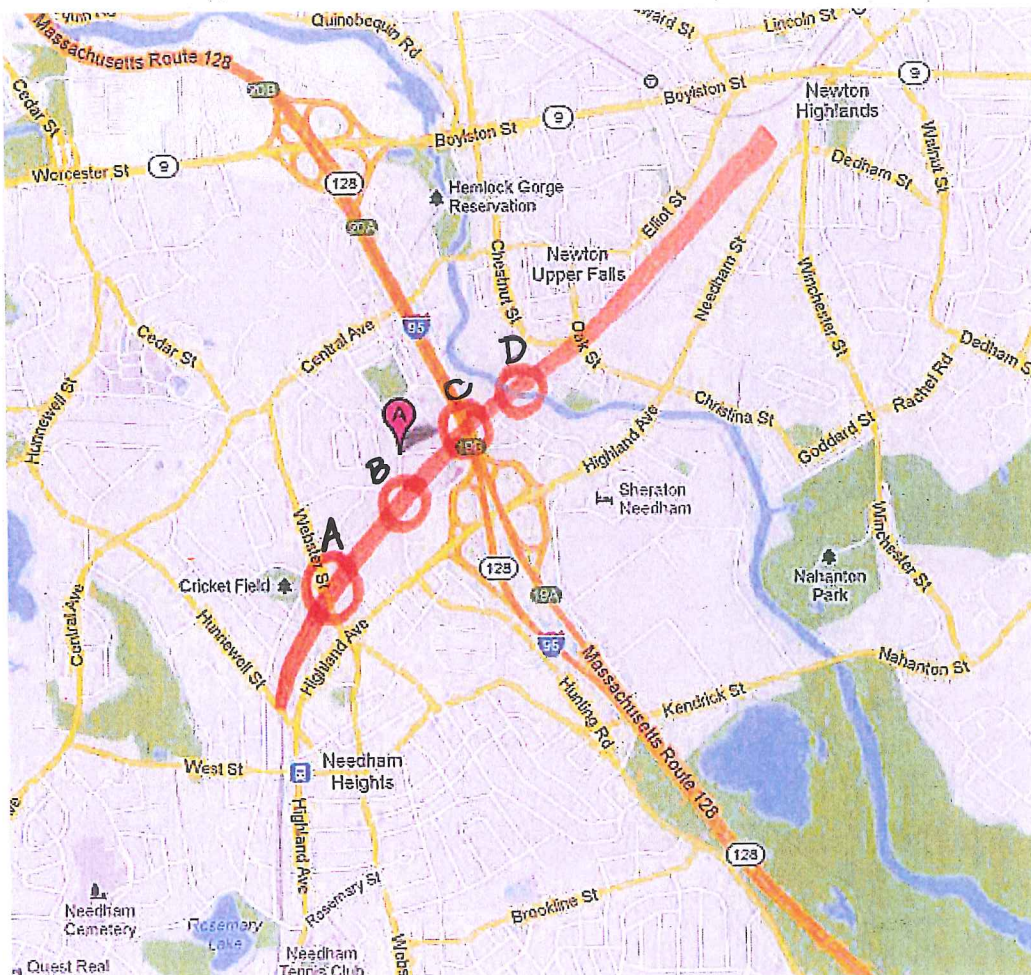
Features along route:

- Access to commuter rail and bus transportation
- Nearby access to new Senior Center, as well as Avery Crossing and Wingate
- Access to Charles River
- Access to Needham Crossing and other local businesses

What's Next?

As the northern section remains in the study phase, the southern section will move towards more concrete plans:

- Study will begin in February, and will include a public workshop in early March to hear comments. A follow-up workshop will be held as the information is compiled for additional input before the final report is written.
- A recommendation will be made to the Selectmen. If the recommendation is to request a lease with the MBTA, it could possibly be brought to May's Town Meeting.
- The non-profit BCRTA will continue its efforts to raise funds.
- If the lease is approved, the official design process would begin. It is still to be determined how this step will be funded.
- It is likely that construction would be done in phases, as funding allows. The rails and ties could be removed at very little cost with a useable surface put in place, and a more permanent surface added at a later stage.
- Continue discussions with Dover, Medfield and Newton.



Bay Colony Rail Trail

Proposed Route

